



The COW PUNCHER

By Robert J.C. Stead

Cutthroats

Kitcheners, and other poems

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Living with his father on a small, badly managed ranch, David Eiden has reached the age of eighteen with few educational advantages. An accident to the auto in which Dr. Hardy, eminent eastern physician, and his daughter Irene, are touring the country, brings a new element into his life. Dr. Hardy's leg is broken, and he is necessarily confined to his bed. Friendship, and something more, develops between Irene and David.

CHAPTER II.—Irene greatly enjoys the unconventional freedom of ranch life, and her acquaintanceship with David ripens into affection. On Dr. Hardy's recovery the young people part, with the understanding that David will seek to improve his position in life and they will meet again.

CHAPTER III.—The sudden death of his father leaves David with practically nothing but the few bare acres of the ranch, the elder man having through years of dissipation wasted the income. His debts paid, David goes to the nearest town, determined to keep his promise to Irene by acquiring an education and making himself worthy of her. He secures the first work offered, driving a team for a coal dealer, and meets a man named Conrad about his own age, by whom he is led into dissipation.

CHAPTER IV.—Naturally of clean mind, David determines to get away from his un congenial surroundings, and Fair brings him into contact with Mr. Melvyn Duncan, who sees the inherent good in the boy and welcomes him to his home, where he meets Edith, his host's pretty daughter, and begins the coveted education.

CHAPTER V.

The summer was not far gone when Dave, through an introduction furnished by Mr. Duncan, got a new job. It was in the warehouse of a wholesale grocery, trundling cases and sacks of merchandise. It was cleaner than handling coal, and the surroundings were more congenial and the wages were better—fifty dollars a month to begin.

"The first thing is to get out of the deadline," said Mr. Duncan. "I am not hoping that you will have found destiny in a wholesale warehouse, but you must get out of the deadline. As long as you shovel coal you will shovel coal. And you are not capable of anything better until you think you are."

"But I've liked it pretty well," said Dave. "As long as I was just working for my wages it was dull going, but it was different after I got to see that even shoveling coal was worth while. I suppose it is the same with groceries, or whatever one does. As soon as you begin to study what you handle, the work loses its drudgery. It isn't a man's job that makes him sick of his job; it's what he thinks of his job."

A light of satisfaction was in his teacher's eyes as Dave made this answer. Mr. Duncan had realized that he was starting late with this pupil, and if there were any short cuts to education he must find them. So he had set out deliberately to instill the idea that education is not a matter of schools and colleges, or courses of reading, or formulae of any kind, but a matter of the five senses applied to every experience of life. And he knew that nothing was coarse or common that passed through Dave's hands.

Dave's energy and enthusiasm in the warehouse soon brought him promotion from truck hand to shipping clerk, with an advance in wages to sixty-five dollars a month. He was prepared to remain in this position for some time, as he knew that promotion depends on many things besides ability. Mr. Duncan had warned him against the delusion that man is entirely master of his destiny.

But Dave was not to continue in the grocery trade. A few evenings later he was engaged in reading in the public library. Mr. Duncan had directed him into the realm of fiction and poetry, and he was now feeling his way through "Hamlet." On the evening in question an elderly man engaged him in conversation.

"You are a Shakespearean student, I see?"

"Not exactly. I read a little in the evenings."

"I have seen you here different times. Are you well acquainted with the town?"

"Pretty well," said Dave, scenting that there might be a purpose in the questioning.

"Working now?"

Dave told him where he was employed.

"I am the editor of the Call," said the elderly man. "We need another man on the street; a reporter, you know. We pay twenty-five dollars a week for such a position. If you are interested you might call at the office tomorrow."

Dave hurried with his problem to Mr. Duncan. "I think I'd like the work," he said. "but I am not sure whether I can do it. My writing is rather wonderful."

Mr. Duncan turned the matter over in his mind. "Yes," he said at length. "but I notice you are beginning to use the typewriter. When you learn that God gave you ten fingers, not two, you may make a typist. And there is nothing more worth while than being able to express yourself in English. They'll teach you that on a newspaper. I think I'd take it."

"Not on account of the money," he continued, after a little. "You would probably soon be earning more in the wholesale business. Newspaper men are about the worst paid of all pro-

fessions. But it's the best training in the world, not for itself but as a step to something else. The training is worth while, and it's the training you want. Take it."

Dave explained his disadvantages to the editor of the Call. "I didn't want you to think," he said, with great frankness, "that because I was reading Shakespeare I was a master of English. And I guess if I were to write up stuff in Hamlet's language I'd get canned for it."

"We'd probably have a deputation from the Moral Reform league," said the editor with a dry smile. "Just the same, if you know Shakespeare you know English, and we'll soon break you into the newspaper style."

So almost before he knew it Dave was on the staff of the Call. His beat comprised the police court, fire department, hotels and general pick-ups.

Dave almost immediately found the need of acquaintanceships. The isolation of his boyhood had bred in him qualities of aloofness which had now to be overcome. He was not naturally a good "mixer," he preferred his own company, but his own company would not bring him much news. So he set about deliberately to cultivate acquaintances with the members of the police force and the fire brigade and the clerks in the hotels. And he had in his character a quality of sincerity which gave him almost instant admission into their friendships. He had not suspected the charm of his own personality, and its discovery, feeding upon his new born enthusiasm for friendships, still further enriched the charm.

As his acquaintanceship with the work of the police force increased Dave found his attitude toward moral principles in need of frequent readjustment. By no means a Puritan, he had nevertheless two sterling qualities which so far had saved him from any very serious misstep. He practiced absolute honesty in all his relationships. His father, drunken although he was in his later years, had never quite lost his sense of commercial uprightness, and Dave had inherited the quality in full degree. And Reenie Hardy had come into his life just when he needed a girl like Reenie Hardy to come into his life. . . . He often thought of Reenie Hardy, and of her compact with him, and wondered what the end would be. He was glad he had met Reenie Hardy. She was an anchor about his soul. . . . And Edith Duncan.

While the gradually deepening current of Dave's life flowed through the channels of coal heaver, freight handler, shipping clerk and reporter its waters were sweetened by the intimate relationship which developed between him and the members of the Duncan household. He continued his studies under Mr. Duncan's directions; two, three, and even four nights in the week found him at work in the comfortable den, or, during the warm weather, on the screened porch that overlooked the family garden. Mrs. Duncan, motherly, and yet not too motherly—she might almost have been an older sister—appealed to the young man as an ideal of womanhood. Her soft, well-modulated voice seemed to him to express the perfect harmony of the perfect home, and underneath its even tones he caught glimpses of a reserve of power and judgment not easily unbalanced. And as Dave's eyes would follow her the tragedy of his own orphaned life bore down upon him and he rebelled that he had been denied the start which such a mother could have given him.

"I am twenty years behind myself," he would reflect, with a grim smile. "Never mind. I will do three men's work for the next ten, and then we will be even."

And there was Edith—Edith who had burst so unexpectedly upon his life that first evening in her father's home. He had not allowed himself any foolishness about Edith. It was evident Edith was pre-empted, just as he was pre-empted, and the part of honor in his friend's house was to recognize the status quo. . . . Still, Mr. Allan Forsyth was unnecessarily self-assured. He might have made it less evident that he was within the enchanted circle while Dave remained outside. His complacency irritated Dave almost into rivalry. But the bon camaraderie of Edith herself checked any adventure of that kind. She was of about the same figure as Reenie Hardy—a little slighter perhaps; and about the same age; and she had the same quick, frank eyes. And she sang wonderfully. He had never heard Reenie sing, but in some strange way he had formed a deep conviction that she would sing much as Edith sang. In love, as in religion, man is forever setting up idols to represent his ideals—and forever finding feet of clay.

Dave was not long in discovering that his engagement as coachman was a device, born of Mr. Duncan's kindness, to enable him to accept instruction without feeling under obligation for it. When he made this discovery he smiled quietly to himself and pretended not to have made it. To have acted otherwise would have seemed ungrateful to Mr. Duncan. And presently the drives began to have a

strange attraction of themselves.

When they drove in the two-seated buggy on Sunday afternoons the party usually comprised Mrs. Duncan and Edith, young Forsyth and Dave. Mr. Duncan was interested in certain Sunday-afternoon meetings. It was Mrs. Duncan's custom to sit in the rear seat for its better riding qualities, and it had a knack of falling about that Edith would ride in the front seat with the driver. She caused Forsyth to ride with her mother, ostensibly as a courtesy to that young gentleman—a courtesy which, it may be conjectured, was not fully appreciated. At first he accepted it with the good nature of one who feels his position secure, but gradually that good nature gave way to a certain testiness of spirit which he could not entirely conceal. . . .

The crisis was precipitated one fine Sunday in September, in the first year of Dave's newspaper experience. Dave called early and found Edith in a riding habit.

"Mother is indisposed," as they say in the society page," she explained. "In other words, she doesn't wish to be bothered. So I thought we would ride today."

"But there are only two horses," said Dave.

"Well?" queried the girl, and there was a note in her voice that sounded



"Well?" Queried the Girl, and There Was a Note in Her Voice That Sounded Strange to Him.

strange to him. "There are only two of us."

"But Mr. Forsyth?"

"He is not here. He may not come. Will you saddle the horses and let us get away?"

It was evident to Dave that for some reason Edith wished to evade Forsyth this afternoon. A lovers' quarrel, no doubt. That she had a preference for him and was revealing it with the utmost frankness never occurred to his sturdy, honest mind. One of the delights of his companionship with Edith had been that it was a real companionship. None of the limitations occasioned by any sex consciousness had narrowed the sphere of the frank friendship he felt for her. She was to him almost as another man, yet in no sense masculine. Save for a certain tender delicacy which her womanhood inspired, he came and went with her as he might have done with a man chum of his own age. And when she preferred to ride without Forsyth it did not occur to Edith that she preferred to ride with him.

They were soon in the country, and Edith, leading, swung from the road to a bridle trail that followed the winding of the river. As her graceful figure drifted on ahead it seemed more than ever reminiscent of Reenie Hardy. What rides they had had on those foothill trails! What dippings into the great canyons! What adventures into the spruce forests! And how long ago it all seemed! This girl, riding ahead, suggestive in every curve and pose of Reenie Hardy. . . . His eyes were burning with loneliness.

He knew he was dull that day, and Edith was particularly charming and vivacious. She coaxed him into conversation a dozen times, but he answered absent-mindedly. At length she leaped from her horse and seated herself, facing the river, on a fallen log. Without looking back she indicated with her hand the space beside her, and Dave followed and sat down.

"You aren't talking today," she said. "You don't quite do yourself justice. What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing," he answered, with a laugh, pulling himself together. "This September weather always gets me. I guess I have a streak of Indian; it comes of being brought up on the ranges. And in September, after the first frosts have touched the foliage—" He paused, as though it was not necessary to say more.

"Yes, I know," she said quietly. Then, with a queer little note of confidence, "Don't apologize for it, Dave."

"Apologize?" and his form straightened. "Certainly not. . . . One doesn't apologize for nature, does he?" . . . But it comes back in September."

He smiled, and she thought the subconscious in him was calling up the smell of fire in dry grass, or perhaps even the rumble of buffalo over the hills. And he knew he smiled because he had so completely misled her. . . . It was dusk when they started homeward.

Forsyth was waiting for her. Dave scented stormy weather and excused himself early.

"What does this mean?" demanded Forsyth angrily as soon as Dave had gone. "Do you think I will take second place to that—that coal heaver?"

"That is not to his discredit," she said.

"Straight from the corns into good society," Forsyth sneered. Then she made no pretense of com-

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HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

She (after the hasty betrothal): "Darling, this ring looks so familiar."

He (studying her more closely): "Can it be possible that—"

She: "Yes, it is—the very same ring! Why, you're the fellow I was engaged to three weeks last summer!"

It can be said of very few men that when they are pulled up by the roots there'll be a hole to look at.—Ashland (Mo.) Bugle.

The chap who whines that he was a fool to get married never seems to remember that he was a fool before that.—Monet (Mo.) Journal.

A man operating a snow shovel is one to whom you can give an inch and he won't take a mile.—Detroit News.

A Boston woman calls her own "the dilly sex." That's a case where an angel may rush in where a male fool would fear to tread.—Philadelphia Record.

Who said truth was stranger than fiction?



"YOU'RE FIRED," said the editor. . . .
 "UNLESS YOU can dig up. . . .
 A LIVE story today." . . .
 SO THE cub reporter. . . .
 DISAPPEARED FOR hours. . . .
 BUT WHEN he recovered. . . .
 FROM HIS trance, he had. . . .
 A STORY—here it is. . . .
 OUR DEPUTY constable. . . .
 WAS WAKENED by the 'phone. . . .
 AND A shrill voice cried. . . .
 "FOR THE love of Mike. . . .
 BEAT IT here quick. . . .
 AND NAIL a nut. . . .
 WHO'S TALKING wild. . . .
 IN THE cigar store." . . .
 THE LONG arm of the law. . . .
 PUT ON his pants. . . .
 SPED TO the scene. . . .

AND AFTER a brief. . . .
 BUT TERRIFIC struggle. . . .
 MADE THE pinch. . . .
 AND WHEN interviewed. . . .
 BY OUR star reporter. . . .
 GAVE OUT this statement. . . .
 "HE'S A loony, all right. . . .
 THE ASYLUM says, by Heck. . . .
 THE WORST they ever had. . . .
 WHY THE poor nut. . . .
 CLAIMS HE can copy. . . .
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 OF THE cigarettes. . . .
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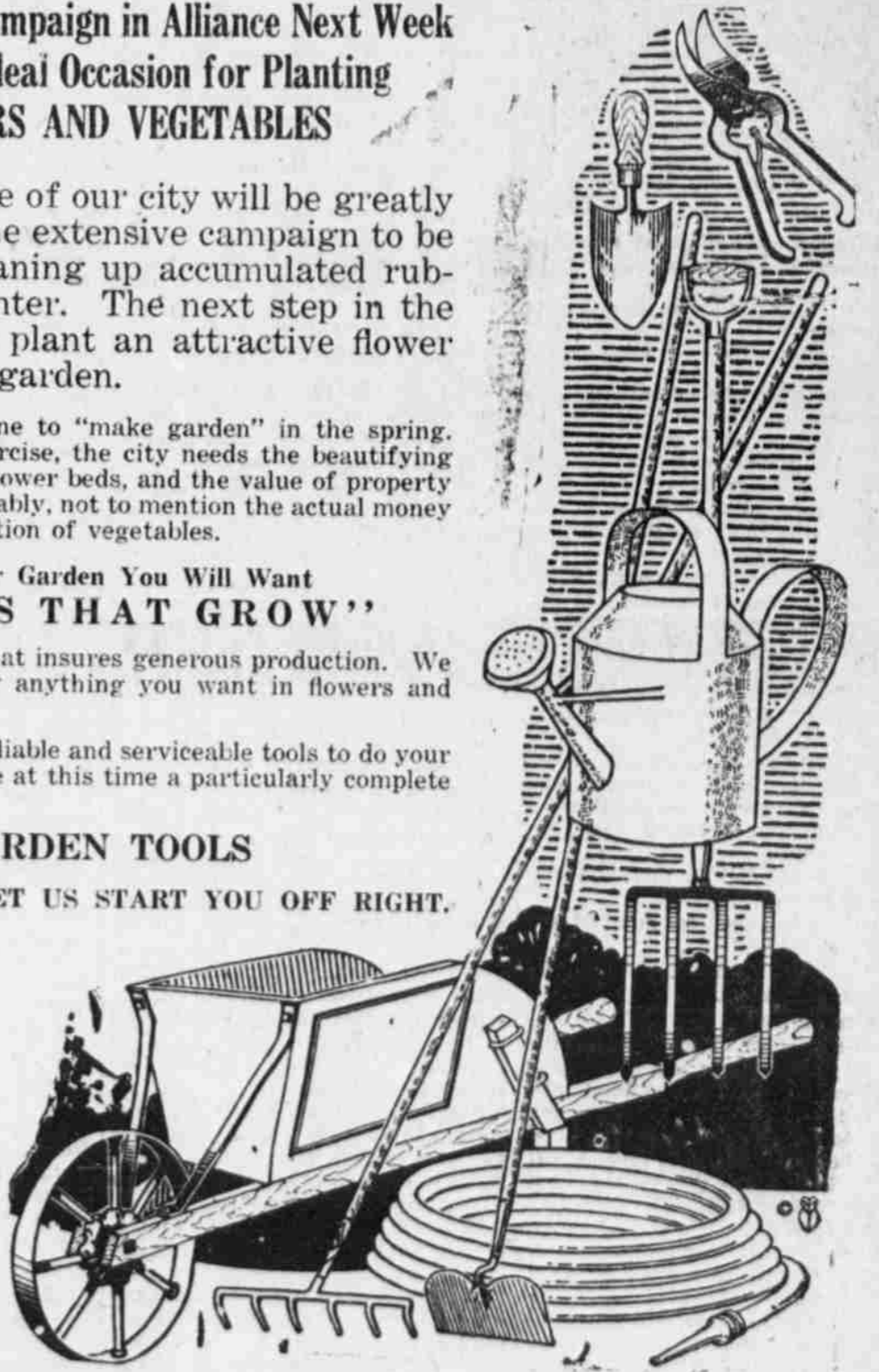
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- Forks,
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